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## Growing a New Crop of “Agropreneurs” in Kenya



Amunga Eshuchi/USAID

Feed the Future works with groups in Kenya to guide them toward successful horticultural entrepreneurship.

Despite rising unemployment among young adults in Kenya, many of the country's youth don't think of farming as an attractive way to make money. However, agriculture is the engine driving the Kenyan economy, and expanding opportunities for young people is central to economic growth.

Under the Feed the Future initiative, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is changing young Kenyans' perception of agriculture through trainings on leadership, marketing and business skills, helping them to see profit potential and motivating them to engage in commercial crop production, value addition, processing and nursery management.

David Rotich was an emerging businessman struggling to earn income working in the service industry in Kericho County, Kenya. He made just enough to get by and support his young family, but his restaurant business required grueling hours.

"I had to be at the restaurant by 5:00am and would close at 11:00pm. It was hectic and I had no time whatsoever with my family," Rotich says.

Rotich began looking for ways to make extra money and decided to try raising cabbage seedlings. He was disappointed when his first crops performed poorly.

"In the field, the seedlings got destroyed by rain, birds and pests, so only a small percentage would germinate," he says.

Rotich attended training with other members of his youth group sponsored by a USAID [project on horticulture](#). The training was part of a "Young Plant Raisers" program designed to encourage budding entrepreneurs to pursue agricultural businesses by teaching them to raise and supply quality certified hybrid vegetable seedlings to farmers for profit. This is a win-win for young people seeking a reliable source of income and for local smallholder farmers who have better commercial access to high-quality planting materials as a result.

At the training, Rotich learned better ways to care for and raise his seedlings. Compared to his first attempts, he was able to sell nearly four times the number of seedlings by using the techniques he learned, and he charged three times as much for their superior quality. Today, Rotich earns a better monthly income growing seedlings than he did in his restaurant business.

"I have a wife, a boy and a girl so the money I get has really been a boost for my family. The youth were all looking to get white collar jobs but lately I have seen a shift in that trend because they are slowly realizing farming can also generate good money," he says.

About 30 youth-run start-ups have received assistance from the project since 2011, and are now in the business of selling

high-quality seedlings to more than 15,000 local farmers. Many of these start-ups reinvest their profits in their businesses through production-enhancing technologies including drip irrigation pipes and propagation trays.

To date, the project has reached more than 37,000 young people in Kenya. Many of these young men and women now transport their own produce to local markets and deliver seedlings to farmers using *boda bodas*, or motorbikes. They use mobile technology to communicate quickly with clients and other group members, retrieve price information and transfer money. And they are also keen on using computers for research, data storage, marketing and accounting.

“If I continue, this business will develop beyond sustaining my family. I am trying to encourage area youth to get into the business since it is an especially good venture,” Rotich says.